2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

PREFACE

THE material on which this book is based was collected during three periods in Nyasaland as a Research Fellow of the International African Institute: May–December 1935; April 1936–June 1937; July 1938–August 1939.

The choice had to be made whether to concentrate on one Ngoni area and omit the other, and also whether to present Ngoni culture as a common element in both areas or to regard them as separate cultural areas. I decided to gather material from northern and central Ngoniland, and accordingly spent about one-third of the time in north Nyasaland and about two-thirds in central Nyasaland. I used the Nyanja language all the time in central Ngoniland, and found that many people understood it in the north. I learned some Zulu, enough to read and hear Ngoni when spoken, but it was dying out as a language except for certain ceremonial and legal terms and expressions. Very few people spoke it in central Ngoniland; most of the older people knew it in the north and in one area it was still the language of the home in 1936.

The decision to present Ngoni culture as a common constituent of Ngoni life in all parts of Nyasaland was made after the material had been analysed. I decided also to attempt a reconstruction of Ngoni life at the time of the first European contacts, when the kingdoms were at the height of their power. Men and women were still alive, when I was in Ngoni villages, who had fought as warriors, who had organized large households, who had been present at the accession and death of the Paramounts. Their experiences were part of Ngoni culture and inseparable from much of what was regarded as essentially 'Ngoni' in the 1930's.

In both areas the informants were of two kinds: those who welcomed an anthropologist who would collect and record Ngoni history, patterns of social organization, and cultural behaviour of which they were intensely proud; and those who were reluctant at first to give information, either because they were Christians and had been at school and said they had 'forgotten'; or because they were suspicious of all Europeans, and did not want to speak of what to them was a treasured and hidden heritage.

Working in more than one language medium and bringing into the open Ngoni terms not as a rule used in the presence of Europeans presented a number of problems both of terminology and orthography. I have included a glossary of Ngoni terms used frequently in the book. There were several variations of the prefixes in common use with Ngoni words, as for example *abalumuzana, alumuzana, malumuzana*, all three of which were used in northern and central Ngoniland. The clicks,

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

193 [194] 104 The clicks

c, x, q, had disappeared in central Ngoniland, and were only pronounced correctly by the older Ngoni in the north. The honorific prefixes before clan names in addressing people, and before first names in reference, also varied according to area, age group and clan ranking. Apparent inconsistencies in spelling which occur in the book reflect these variations.

I have adopted English translations of certain Ngoni expressions and have used them throughout without quotation marks. An obvious example is Paramount for *inkosi*; and the use of 'house' for the Ngoni institution, and 'hut' for the dwelling place.

122 I acknowledge with gratitude the Fellowship given by the International African Institute which made possible the visits to Nyasaland; the grant from the London School of Economics for the research assistants, Miss Ruth Jones and Mr. G. P. Hall, who helped me collate material; the officials and missionaries in Nyasaland who gave hospitality and assisted me in every possible way; and the African people of the Ngoni kingdoms who, as my hosts in the villages and my helpers at all times, welcomed me into their midst and gave me an insight into their Ngoni culture.

London, 1955 MARGARET READ

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

593 167 Some men when they decide to return home from work in the normal course of events do not let their relatives know that they will be arriving. There are a variety of reasons for this, one being that the mystical hazards of the journey home are increased if a man's enemies know that it is taking place. There is also sometimes the desire to check on the fidelity of a wife. A chief returning from the railway line in 1947 reached Fort Jameson and sent on ahead a man to tell the people their chief had returned. A councillor who was with him remarked 'What sort of chief is this who gives his queens time to get back to their own houses? We ought to arrive suddenly and catch them all with their lovers.'

593 167 602 The woman's kin also wish to avoid trouble in her marriage and do what they can to prevent her committing adultery if they think that her husband is still treating her well. They talk to her about her obligations to her absent husband and if they think she cannot be trusted, one of them, perhaps the woman's mother, may sleep in the hut with her to see that she does not entertain lovers there. They may warn her that if she is taken to court for adultery they will not support her.

Thus we see that there is social prescription not only of the ways in which a man and his affines should behave towards each other, but also of the ways in which his affines should behave when the man is away. Similarly a woman and her affines interact in the light of their relationship not only when her husband is present but also when he has been absent for years. As a husband can exceed his rights over his wife, so can an affine go beyond what is tolerated while trying to safeguard the interests of an absent husband. The perseverence of some brothers of absent husbands, and the limitations imposed on their actions by public opinion, are recalled by a girls' song current in 1949.

[533] I am wanting to go and sleep,
What stops me is something in the loins,
I go to the water, and the one who keeps on following comes,
He has exceeded his sibling-in-law-ship,[18]
He has dragged Eleni from the reeds.

[607] Eleni is supposed to be the wife of a labour migrant. Her husband's brother follows her to the stream, where she has gone ostensibly to draw water, as he thinks that she is really going to meet a lover. She hides in the reeds and he drags her out. Such active intervention is inappropriate and dangerous for if there is a struggle the woman is likely to claim that the man was trying to rape her. The astute brother-in-law would have waited his time until he could catch her red-handed with her lover in a village.

167 831 It is never legitimate for a woman whose husband is a labour migrant to have intercourse with another man. People regret that

[193] [18] *Ulamu*, the abstract noun formed from *mulamu*, sibling-in-law.

9: Read E-5 (1935) 1936 FR5 Ngoni FR5

814 621 the villages of certain chiefs in the south were preserved.[1] In Mwambera's country there are the names of villages belonging to nine generations of Jere chiefs, and in Gomani's country for seven generations of Maseko chiefs. Villages holding these historic names are in charge of an individual of high rank who is never called the 'owner' of that village but 'the one who takes care'. I realized how clear to the people is the historical significance of these village names, when I asked a question and they exclaimed, 'What? You do not know about Elangeni being the village of Hlachwayo? But all Ngoni people can know that.'[2]

814 614 [193] [576] 4. Clan names. The clan names, as the Ngoni say, denote a person's 'tribe' and the respect due to him. With the prefix, *e*, *a*, *na* (according to the area) the clan name is used as a respectful form of address, and always when thanking for a gift or favour. The tone of reverence with which the great clan names are thus mentioned is itself an indication of the rank and honour of a person.

814 621 5. Village descent. In old days Ngoni villages were very much larger than to-day. The headman of a village on your first visit will always give you the genealogy of his village, how it split off from A, which split off from B, which was the *chigawa* under *induna* X of the big village of chief Y. Reciting these village genealogies generally leads to some recalling of the past, and the village notables, the *amadoda*, gather round to corroborate or correct the headman's recital.

814 It takes very little to stimulate the Ngoni to historical conversations. I have heard them originate in the return of a villager from Johannesburg, where he met Zulu and Swazi men and found they could speak together and had common traditions; in a sermon preached by an Ngoni minister in which he used illustrations from Ngoni warfare; in a rebuke from the Boma to a headman for trying to move his village from worn out land to a site outside the Reserve on an empty farm. And it is not only the aristocrats who take part in such conversations. Sometimes it is evident that men and boys whose [619] fathers had been slaves are anxious to show their knowledge of Ngoni history in order to prove their unity with the true Ngoni.

[1] I am not clear yet what was the precise sociological process by which the identity of these villages was preserved.

[2] An idiomatic use which has the force of a double negative 'No one cannot know it'.

13:Fraser M-5 (ca. 1890)1901
FR5 Ngoni FR5

[101] [175] ardly people compared with the wild spirits who remained under Mombera.

This tribe is variously named Mazitu, Vikoko, Abangoni, and so on, and readers of Livingstone's 'Zambezi and its Tributaries,' will remember his frequent references to the wild marauding bands of Mazitu. The word Abangoni, by which the tribe calls itself, [186] simply means "The people." They reckon themselves the blooded aristocrats of Africa.

[193] The prefix *aba* before ngoni, is simply the plural form of the noun *umgoni*, a single man. The country is called Ubungoni, and the language Chingoni. For the peculiarity of the Bantu languages, is that words alter their number from singular to plural, and character from noun to adjective, not by changing the suffix but the prefix.

197 The language which the Ngoni speak is a slight modification of Zulu—but they only use two clicks—the dental *c* and labial *q*. In our schools therefore we use the Zulu literature in which there are already nearly 40 volumes, and the best of these are the translations left by Bishop Colenso. Zulu is however rapidly dying [560] out, as the language of the slaves and of the surrounding tribes is becoming the vernacular of the common people. When Mombera's 175 Ngoni settled down in the watershed of the Ruhuru, they soon made their presence disagreeably felt throughout West Nyasa. Their marauding parties were always out on the war path. Dressing [1126] in a frightsome garb of cock feathers, carrying a large shield and two or three stabbing assegais, they terrorised the neighbouring tribes. They used to sleep near some village which they wished to attack, and then in the early morning just before the light had come, with a wild war whoop they would sweep through the village, killing the men and the old people; then when they had seized the women and children and tied them together they would start back for the hills, driving with them all the cattle and sheep and goats that they could find. Their fighting was never done in the open. It generally took the form of a wild and sudden rush, and in a moment bleeding corpses were lying about, and the village was in flames.

The terrified people betook themselves to huge stockaded villages, [101] others piled their villages in the lake itself. The Poka, and Henga fled to mountain fastnesses, and built on the edges of fearful precipices, the Senga fled to the Luangwa marsh and built great protected villages in the depths of huge thorn thickets. And the land became